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ABSTRACT

Identifying the variables which influence student attitudes, perceptions, and behavior patterns in regard to religion, sex, and alcohol has been a major source of investigation. To determine the dimensions underlying the relationship among religion, sex, alcohol use, and alcohol knowledge among university students, 376 University of Maryland students (52% males, 48% females) completed an anonymous questionnaire on the subject. Principal components factor analyses identified eight factors which represented the ways students organized their perceptions of the areas studied. The factors were: personal sexual code, dogmatism, dualism, religiosity, alcohol information, alcohol consumption and sex, alcoholism, parental drinking behavior, and conservatism. An analysis of the results showed that men and women differed on three factors (personal sexual code, dogmatism, and alcohol information). While women were less likely than men to be dualistic or dogmatic in their approach to religion, sex, or alcohol, they were also more likely to support a double standard, feeling that sexual intimacy for women should be based on love, but accepting that men base sex on mutual attraction. Additionally, women did not see a link between sexual satisfaction and alcohol consumption as men did. Women also were less likely to feel that virginity is strange or that homosexuals need help. These results suggest that men may feel different pressures to adjust to their sexuality. Thus, programming which is unique to the problems and adjustment of each sex may be more beneficial. (BL)

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DIMENSIONS UNDERLYING STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF RELIGION, SEX, AND ALCOHOL: MALE AND FEMALE DIFFERENCES

Aldrich M. Patterson, Jr. and William E. Sedlacek

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SUMMARY

376 University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) students (52% male, 48% female) were administered an anonymous questionnaire concerning their perceptions of religion, sex, and alcohol use and information. Principal components factor analyses identified eight factors which represent the ways students organize their perceptions of the areas studied. The factors were labeled: Personal Sexual Code, Dogmatism, Dualism, Religiosity, Alcohol Information, Alcohol Consumption and Sex, Alcoholism, Parental Drinking Behavior and Conservatism. Students scoring high and low on each factor were profiled, and differences in male and female profiles were noted. Implications for conducting programs for students are discussed.

There has been considerable interest in the areas of religion, sex, and alcohol as influencers of college student development. Identifying the variables which influence student attitudes, perceptions and behavior patterns in these three areas has been a major source of investigation. However, there appears to be a lack of research attempting to integrate all three of these areas in a common framework, although there are many studies which have examined the impact of these variables independently or in limited combination.

Pervasive throughout the research literature is the conclusion that religion is the single best predictor of sexual attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors among college students (Bell & Chaske, 1970; Burgess & Wallin, 1953; Debman, 1959; Ehrmann, 1959; Freeman & Freeman, 1966; Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). This body of literature suggests that concern with religion is inversely related to premarital sexual attitudes and sexual behavior. On the other hand, King, Abernathy, Jr., Robinson, and Botswick (1976) found no significant relationship between concern with religion and premarital sexual behavior.

In two separate studies, Ogren (1974) and Primeau (1977) examined whether religious belief or sexual guilt was a better predictor of sexual attitudes and sexual behavior. In both studies, it was concluded that sexual guilt resulting from early religious training and experiences is a better predictor of sexual attitudes and behavior than religion. Further evidence to support this notion was provided by Gunderson and McCory (1979), who investigated whether religion or sexual guilt was a better predictor of three sex variables: 1) sex information obtained, 2) sexual attitudes held, and 3) sexual behavior expressed. They concluded that religion is an intervening variable with sexual guilt. This suggests that students who more frequently attend church are more likely to

experience higher levels of sexual guilt, which may interfere more with their sexuality than students who rarely attend church.

In reference to alcohol use, it is reported that less religiously oriented students are more likely to start drinking earlier and drink more than their religious counterparts (Jessor & Jessor, 1975; Moos, Moos, & Kulik, 1976; 1977). Straus and Bacon (1953), in their landmark study investigating "Drinking in College," asked students if they thought that alcohol consumption enhances or accompanies feelings of sexual excitement or facilitates such physical involvement as petting, kissing and/or sexual intercourse. Their findings illustrate that over half of the males and females sampled felt that drinking precipitated feelings of sexual excitement, petting, and "necking." With respect to drinking and sexual intercourse, 31% of the females and 47% of the males felt that alcohol contributed to sexual facilitation.

In a study conducted by Grossman (1965), the level of drinking motivation among college students was found to be positively associated with the inability to delay gratification, levels of psychological frustration, feelings of personal helplessness and powerlessness and parental disapproval. Jessor, Carmer and Grossman (1968) found that heavy drinkers among college students were more likely to have low expectations of general need satisfaction than those students who drank less. Orford, Waller, and Peto (1974) found that peer-group pressure is a major influencer in student drinking. This is further supported by Twice and Beyer (1977) who found a tendency among college drinkers to reject their alcohol abstaining contemporaries as friends and associates.

Strange and Schmidt (1979) and Minatova, Sedlacek, Heckman, and Bridwell (1983) have found that college students have limited knowledge of how alcohol affects them. Minatoya and her colleagues noted that males were less likely

to admit their lack of knowledge than females.

The lack of clarity from the literature had led to a fragmentation and lack of coordination among student services at many colleges and universities. At the University of Maryland, College Park, agencies such as the Counseling Center, Health Center, Women's Center, Student Government Association, Chaplain's services and emergency services all offer a variety of services and programs in the areas of religious orientation, sexual attitudes and behavior, and alcohol use and abuse.

The purpose of the present study was to determine the dimensions underlying the relationship among religion, sex, alcohol use and alcohol knowledge among university students. These dimensions could then be employed in coordinating and developing programs and services.

Method

A representative sample of 376 students (52% males, 48% females) at the University of Maryland, College Park was administered an anonymous 164 item questionnaire concerning their perceptions of religion, sex, and alcohol use and information. The items (with sex as a dummy variable) were intercorrelated and factor analyzed, using principal components analysis with squared multiple correlations as communality estimates, with all factors with eigenvalues over 1.00 rotated to a varimax solution. Such an analysis would allow for a determination of the ways students organize their perceptions of these areas so that programs and services can be better organized and focused.

Eight factors were found to account for 100% of the common variance among the items Table 1 describes students scoring high and low on each factor. The eight factors we labeled: I Personal Sexual Code, II Dogmatism/Dualism, III Religiosity, IV Alcohol Information, V Alcohol Consumption and Sex, VI

Alcoholism, VII Parental Drinking Behavior, and VIII Conservatism. There were differences between men and women on three factors (I, II, and V).

Discussion

The results showed that religion, sex, and alcohol are interrelated in a way that it makes it useful to consider these relationships when designing student services. Each factor in Table 1 represents an independent dimension around which programs could be developed. Each factor represents a certain "type" of student who scores high or low on that dimension, and hence translates into what appeals, recruiting methods, and, ultimately, content might be employed in services or programs.

Religious Programs

The implications of the study for religious programs would appear to be: (1) There is a type of student who sees religion as a primary force in his/her life (Factor III), who is likely to be a virgin. These two issues may interact in such a way as to cause adjustment problems for such students. (2) There are other students who see issues including religion as dualistic (Factor II - right or wrong, good or bad). This approach influences their campus life and may present them with many difficulties. Perry (1970) discusses the implications of such an outlook in terms of his developmental theory.

There are several other factors in which religion plays a secondary role and should be considered in student religious programming. Factor IV describes a type of student who is uninformed about alcohol and who is not religious, and Factor VIII describes a student who is conservative and feels one should be religious.

Sex-Related Programs

Implications for those providing student services related to sex and

sexuality appear to be: (1) There is a type of student (low scorer - Factor I) who has conservative positions on sexual behavior, and feels that men should be free to engage in premarital sex based on mutual attraction, but women are expected to engage in sex based on love. For some students, expectations of a double standard (or a single standard for high scorers) will be the focal point of their sexuality and sexual adjustment. (2) For some students (Factor V), alcohol is seen as a direct link to a satisfying sex life. Exploring this supposed link and the implications for sexual adjustment would appear to be an important area for programming.

Some aspect of sex and sexuality runs through seven of the eight factors. For instance, Factor II describes a dualistic student who sees right and wrong on sexual issues, Factor III describes students who link virginity and religiosity, and Factor IV notes that there is a type of student who had limited information about alcohol and is conservative about sex, but who is different from the other types of students described here. Factor VII isolates a type of student whose parents have a drinking problem and believes in a double sexual standard, and Factor VIII students are generally conservative, including their views on sex.

Alcohol Programs

Implications of the study for providing alcohol related programs appear to be: (1) There are individuals who know little about the effects of alcohol and do not associate with those who drink (Factor IV). Programming for them might take a public information orientation. (2) There is a group of students who associate alcohol consumption with successful sexual activity (Factor V). This group also feels they know about the effects of alcohol, but do not demonstrate more knowledge than their peers. This might be a particularly critical

group to reach, since alcohol is associated with other reinforcers and basic needs in life, and a tendency to feel they have the "answers" when they don't. (3) Factor VI depicts a group that is afraid of alcohol and becoming alcoholic. The low scorers show a lack of fear and see alcohol as safer than marijuana. Both high and low scorers could present prime audiences for services or programs to prevent problems in handling alcohol. (4) Some students reported that one or both parents have a drinking problem, and this is linked with favoring a double standard for men and women on sexual behavior.

Other factors which showed alcohol relatedness were II, where dualistic students felt alcoholics were weak and one couldn't become an alcoholic drinking only beer, and VIII where conservatives felt that drinking beer was wrong.

Differences By Sex

Men and women differed on three factors, and the differences are complex. While women were less likely to be dualistic or dogmatic in their approach to religion, sex or alcohol than men, women were also more likely to support a double standard and feel that sexual intimacy should be based on love for women, but accepted that men base sex on mutual attraction (Factors I and II). Additionally, women did not see a link between sexual satisfaction and alcohol consumption as men did, but women were less likely to feel that virginity is strange or homosexuals need help (Factor V).

The results suggest that men may feel different pressures to adjust to their sexuality. Thus, some programming which is unique to the problems and adjustment of each sex is called for.

As one takes an overall look at the study, many of the results were expected and fit rather well with current student services offered, but others appear more unexpected and complex. In any case, the writers feel that student

affairs programs should be developed wherever possible on the way students organize their perceptions rather than on models developed from other sources. It is hoped that this study provides some ideas for professionals and students alike who are concerned with the areas studied.

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Table 1
Profiles of High and Low Scorers on Nine Factors

FACTOR I - Personal Sexual Code (21% of common variance)

High Scorers - Liberal attitudes toward sex; intercourse and living together before marriage is acceptable. Sex based on mutual attraction without love is acceptable. No separate sex codes seen for males and females. Men are more likely to score high.

Low Scorers - Conservative attitudes toward sex; intercourse and living together before marriage are not acceptable. Sex should be based on love. Separate sex codes for men and women are acceptable; men are expected to have some intercourse based on attraction, women are expected to have intercourse based on love. Women are more likely to score low.

FACTOR II - Dogmatism/Dualism (17% of common variance)

High Scorers - Dogmatic and dualistic perceptions of religion (you are 100% American or not; religion directs whole life), alcohol (alcoholics are weak; you won't become alcoholic drinking only beer) and sex (there are two kinds of women; good and bad). Men are more likely to score high.

Low Scorers - See gradations in perceptions of religion, alcohol and sex. Women are more likely to score low.

FACTOR III - Religiosity (14% of common variance)

High Scorers - Concerned with role of religion in their lives, likely not to have had sexual intercourse. No differences by sex.

Low Scorers - Feel religion irrelevant to their lives. Likely to be sexually experienced. No differences by sex.

FACTOR IV - Alcohol Information (13% of common variance)

High Scorers - Have limited information and experience with alcohol. Feel alcohol is not a drug; do not know percentages of alcohol in various drinks. Friends do not drink. Conservative about sex (living together before marriage not acceptable) but not religious. No differences by sex.

Low Scorers - Knowledgeable about alcohol and its effects, feel alcohol is a drug. Have friends who drink. More tolerant of living together before marriage. Religion has some role in their lives. No differences by sex.

FACTOR V - Alcohol Comsumption and Sex (12% of common variance)

High Scorers - Feel that alcohol comsumption enhances sexual activity. Feel they know more about the effects of alcohol on their bodies and behavior, although do not score higher on factual alcohol information items. Tend to be more sexually active, and feel virginity is strange and homosexuals need help. Men are more likely to score high.

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Table 1
Profiles of High and Low Scorers on Nine Factors

FACTOR V cont.

Low Scorers - Do not see a relationship between alcohol consumption and enjoyment of sex. Do not feel they know more than others about the effects of alcohol on their bodies and behavior, and do not score higher on alcohol informati items. Tend to be less sexually active, but do not feel virginity is strange or homosexuals need help. Women are more likely to score low.

FACTOR VI - Alcoholism (10% of common variance)

High Scorers - Tend to feel they could become alcoholics. Do not see alcohol as safer than marijuana, and feel alcohol has negative effects on people and their behavior. No differences by sex.

Low Scorers - Tend to feel they could not become alcoholics. See alcohol as safer than marijuana, and do not feel alcohol has negative effects on people and their behavior. No differences by sex.

FACTOR VII - Parental Drinking Behavior (7% of common variance)

High Scorers - Report that neither parent has a drinking problem. Do not feel that men and women have different sexual codes. No differences by sex.

Low Scorers - Report that one or both parents have a drinking problem. Feel that women should not have premarital sex, but it is acceptable for men. No differences by sex.

FACTOR VIII - Conservatism (6% of common variance)

High Scorers - Tend to take "conservative" positions and feel: sex should be confined to married people; homosexuals need help; one should be religious; drinking alcohol is wrong. No differences by sex.

Low Scorers - Tend to take "liberal" positions and feel: sex should be based on mutual attraction; homosexuals do not need help; one should not be religious and that drinking alcohol is acceptable. No differences by sex.

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